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Lawsuit Filed to Protect Northern Rockies Fisher Under Endangered Species Act

Rare Forest Carnivore From Idaho, Montana Threatened by Trapping, Habitat Loss

VICTOR, Idaho— The Center for Biological Diversity filed a [lawsuit](#) today against the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for failing to make a decision on whether to protect the [Northern Rockies fisher](#) under the Endangered Species Act. The Center petitioned for protection for the fisher in 2013, but the Service is now more than two years late in making a decision on the imperiled carnivore's protection. The secretive old-growth predator once ranged through five states, but after nearing extinction due to habitat loss and trapping, today survives only along the border of northern Idaho and Montana.

"Fishers are being killed by trappers at an alarming rate," said Andrea Santarsiere, a staff attorney with the Center. "Only, the protection of the Endangered Species Act can safeguard the remaining populations and spur recovery."

Fishers are cat-like, medium-sized members of the weasel family with slender, brown bodies and long, bushy tails. Related to minks and otters, and the only true predators of porcupines, fishers once inhabited old-growth forests from northeastern Washington, Idaho, Montana and northwest Wyoming to north-central Utah. While the fishers have recovered from near extirpation in the 1920s, the population is still struggling.

Fishers are still legally trapped in Montana, and as trapping for wolves, bobcats and other species has increased in Idaho and Montana, so have levels of "incidental" trapping of fishers. Twice as many fishers have been incidentally trapped in Idaho since 2008 as were captured from 2002 to 2007. Reported nontarget catch of fishers by individual fur-takers in Idaho from the 2010-2011 season through the 2014-2015 season have totaled 159, 66 of which have been killed. It is unknown how many fishers are incidentally trapped and killed in Montana each year because the state does not maintain records of nontarget catch.

The Center and five other conservation organizations filed a petition seeking federal protection for the Northern Rockies fisher in September 2013. In January of this year the Service issued a positive "90-day finding" on the petition and is now conducting a review of the animal's status to determine if protection is warranted. The litigation filed today will ensure that the determination is completed in a timely manner.

The Northern Rockies fisher is one of 10 species the Center is prioritizing this year for Endangered Species Act protection decisions. Under a 2011 settlement agreement with the Service, the Center can seek expedited decisions on protection for 10 species per year. The other nine priority species for 2016 include the monarch butterfly, California spotted owl, alligator snapping turtle, wood turtle, Virgin River spinedace, foothill yellow-legged frog, Canoe Creek pigtoe, Barrens topminnow and beaverpond marstonia. Under the settlement 144 species have gained protection to date, and 36 species have been proposed for protection.

The Center for Biological Diversity is a national, nonprofit conservation organization with more than 990,000 members and online activists dedicated to the protection of endangered species and wild places.

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